



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
COMMANDER
AMPHIBIOUS SQUADRON THREE
UNIT 25097
FPO AP 96601-5802

24 January 2004

Dear Family and Friends,

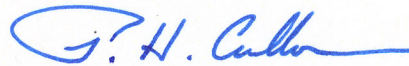
I just wanted to provide you with some up to date information on what your loved ones have been doing this past month. I mentioned in the previous Familygram that their performance has been exceptional. I'm happy to report that they continue on their same superb pace. I continue to be impressed on a daily basis with their efforts and contributions in making this maiden deployment of an Expeditionary Strike Group a success. They are making history and writing the book on new tactics, techniques and procedures that will help us win the Global War on Terror. Operationally, COMPHIBRON THREE Staff personnel have been conducting numerous operations in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraq Freedom, including Maritime Interdiction Ops (MIO) in the Arabian Sea to regional engagement exercises with countries in the Horn of Africa. In that regard, they have stopped over 2,800 metric tons of oil being smuggled out of Iraq and been an integral part of catching illicit drugs that may be linked to Al Qaeda financiers.

At the close of December, we enjoyed a welcome port visit in Jebel Ali for the holidays. The holy period of Ramadan had ended and this time downtown Dubai clubs/restaurants were open for business. Sailors and Marines also frequented the local malls, some taking advantage of the opportunity to see current running films in the theater such as *Return of the King*. In port, the USS PELELIU's MWR did an exceptional job hosting numerous events and activities to help celebrate the holidays. Various sports events were scheduled and boasted high participation, such as softball, golf, basketball, sand volleyball, and rugby. Major events that took place included a visit from Ben Affleck onboard PELELIU, a USO Concert featuring the country music band Rushlow, and fantastic holiday meals for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day out in the open air. Inside the infamous "Sandbox," an Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) Christmas Wrestling Tournament took place. There was participation from both Navy/Marine Corps personnel, and the event turned out quite entertaining. In addition to the ship-sponsored events, the CPR3 and ESG staffs held a Christmas Party at the Seaman's Club in Dubai. The Seaman's Club has a long history of hosting Sailors/Marines visiting the area - signed ship pictures/ball caps hanging on the walls displayed the pride the Club managers have in supporting United States Naval Service members over the years. The Christmas party was a memorable event enjoyed by all in attendance.

Of the many distinguished visitors who have come to visit the ESG, one of the most welcome was General Abizaid, Commander, CENTCOM. He spent a few hours onboard PELELIU to speak with the troops as he toured the ship, and spoke to staff members from inside the Joint Operations Center about our continued efforts in support of the Global War on Terror. It was especially worthwhile to note that he recognized the "flexibility" the ESG provides when in theater, further validating our experimental efforts behind forming expeditionary strike groups for future deployments.

We are looking forward to the completion of our operations in the Persian Gulf region and our eventual return to San Diego. Please realize that we are not at liberty to discuss specific return dates yet and be advised that emergent taskings may still come our way that could well impact our eventual arrival in San Diego. Rest assured that when we can, this information will be promulgated and passed to the PHIBRON Ombudsman. The good news is that we are on the downhill slope of this deployment and you have much to be proud of your PHIBRON Three warrior who will be returning with new stories of what they did to help fight and win the Global War on Terror.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P. H. Cullom". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

P. H. CULLOM